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ABSTRACT

This report presents a statistical profile of Latino literacy in the United States based on a secondary analysis of the 1976 Survey of Income and Education, the 1979 National Chicano Survey, and the 1980 Census. Overall illiteracy in English for the Hispanic population was 14.7 percent, but the rate varied when the population was broken down by country of origin from 7.8 percent for ethnic Cubans to 18.5 percent for ethnic Mexicans. Rates of illiteracy were higher for immigrants, for older individuals, and for Spanish monolinguals. Illiteracy varied from state to state and steadily decreased as personal income increased. Little difference in literacy was noted between sexes. Illiteracy was found to be the result of school failure in educating Latinos, especially those born in the United States. It is suggested that four areas of concern--language acquisition, barriers to acquisition, adolescent and adult illiteracy, and English literacy requirements--should be stressed as a framework for developing a long-term, comprehensive policy research and analysis agenda. An extensive bibliography is included. (JL)

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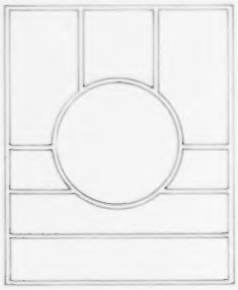

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LATINO ILLITERACY

in the

UNITED STATES

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and

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August 1, 1988

Abstract

Latino Illiteracy in the United States

Reynaldo F. Macías

The following report is the result of a study on Latino literacy in the United States, including a secondary analysis of three data sets: the 1976 Survey of Income and Education, the 1979 National Chicano Survey, and the 1980 Census.[1] We have found that Latinos are not given much attention in the literacy debates, research, or services in the nation. The lack of statistical visibility of Latino illiteracy results in a policy invisibility. The debates argue about causes and "cures" of illiteracy, but assume that literacy is only in one language--English--and so Spanish literacy is ignored both as a vehicle for biliteracy (with English), and even AS literacy, amongst many a service provider. Literacy services to Latinos is seen as a second priority to oral English as a second language services. English literacy requirements are, and have been used as a barrier to entitled social, economic and political services.

Illiteracy was found to be the result of school failure of educating Latinos, especially the native born. A four-point policy framework is identified for a comprehensive approach to Latino *literacy* programs and policies. The following is a part of the statistical profile of Latinos and English illiteracy (using years of schooling).

- Illiteracy for the total Spanish origin population in the nation was 14.7% in 1980 (Census). The Mexican origin population had a rate of 18.5%, Puerto Ricans a rate of 13.4%, Cubans 7.8%, while other Latinos had a combined rate of 8.2%. In 1976 (SIE), the general rate of illiteracy was estimated at 16.9%, while the subgroup rates were: Mexican origin, 20.7%; Puerto Rican, 17%; Cuban, 10%; Central/South Americans, 7.4%, and other Latinos, 8.9%.

- Illiteracy varied little between males and females: males, 16.6% and females, 17.1% in 1976 (SIE); males, 15.4% and females, 14% in 1980 (Census).

- States ranked slightly differently in illiteracy rates for the total Spanish origin population: TX (21.8%), CA (16.1%), AZ (15.6%), IL (14.9%), NY (11.3%), NM (11%), CO (10.5%), FL (10.3%) (Census).

- Non-native or non-mainland born Latinos, and non-citizens had higher rates of illiteracy than native born Latinos (Census). The illiteracy rate for native born Mexicans was estimated at 10.7% as compared to naturalized Mexicans which was estimated at 32%; for foreign born non-citizen Mexicans it was estimated at 34.3%. Mainland born Puerto Ricans had a low rate of 2%, while island born Puerto Ricans had an illiteracy rate of 18.5%. Native born Cubans also had a low rate of 3.8%, while Cuban naturalized citizens had a rate of 5.2%, and foreign born, non-citizen Cubans had a rate of 10.8%. For

[1] The project was funded by the Inter-University Program/Social Science Research Council competition on Public Policy and Latinos, underwritten by the Ford Foundation. The project grant was awarded to the Tomás Rivera Policy Center, Claremont, CA.

other Spanish origin populations, the combined rates for native born was 5.3%, naturalized citizens was 4.4%, and for non-citizens 14%.

- Illiteracy rates for all Latinos increased steadily with age (Census). The estimated rates for different age bands were: 18 years to 25 years of age, 5.6%; 26 to 35 years of age, 8.9%; 36 to 45 years, 14.9%; 46 years to 55 years, 22.9%; 56 years to 65 years, 28.8%; and 66 years of age and up, 42.3%. The NCS indicated higher rates for the Mexican origin population in 1979: 17 years to 25 years of age, 13.9%; 26 to 35 years of age, 16%; 36 to 45 years, 21.5%; 46 years to 55 years, 38.5%; 56 years to 65 years, 51.9%; and 66 years of age and up, 67.1%.

- English illiteracy rates, in 1980, were higher for Latinos who were Spanish monolinguals (37.6%) than for bilinguals (8.1%) or English monolinguals (4.3%) (Census).

- Illiteracy rates for all Latinos declined steadily as personal income went up: 15.7% for those with no income; 21.3% for those with $5,000 or less annual income in 1979; 14.6% for those with income from $5,000 to $9,999; 7.8% for those with income between $10,000 and $14,999; 6.1% for those with income between $15,000 and $19,999; 5.3% for those with income between $20,000 and $24,999; 8.1% for those between $25,000 and $29,999; and 5.8% for those with incomes of $30,000 and over (Census).

- Using a self report measure, the NCS estimated 25.9% of the Mexican origin population as not literate in English OR Spanish in 1979.

- Literacy abilities only in English were reported by 31.8% of the Mexican origin population, while 20.2% reported biliteracy in English and Spanish, and 22.2% only in Spanish.

Table 1
English Illiteracy by Latino Sub-Group, 1980

	Illiterate	Functionally Literate	Literate
Mexicans	18.50	36.50	45.00
Puerto Ricans	13.40	39.60	47.10
Cubans	7.80	28.70	63.50
Other Latinos	8.20	28.30	63.40
Total	14.70	34.50	50.80

Source: 1980 Census. Public use tapes.
Note: Measure is number of school years completed. Illiteracy was defined as less than 6 years of schooling, functional literacy as 6 to 12 years, and literate as completion of 12 years or more.

Latino Illiteracy in the United States[1]

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August 1, 1988 (Monday)

Introduction

Illiteracy is significant because society attaches a high importance to *literacy*. In order to understand the importance and extent of literacy and illiteracy amongst the Latino population, it is necessary to understand why literacy has become a concern generally. It is generally believed that literacy is a requisite for effective functioning in contemporary U.S. society. Literacy, or more specifically, English literacy, has significance because social, political and economic benefits are predicated upon it (Leibowitz, 1969). Literacy in general, and English literacy in particular, has been tied to differential participation in the political process of this nation, and to accessibility of political information. The denial of literacy competence to any segment of the national population prejudices that group's opportunities for participating in social, political (*Castro v. California*), and economic activities for improving its status, for obtaining information and knowledge, and for gaining access to societal benefits. Since many Latinos fall below national norms in literacy and education, the general societal expectations of literacy abilities amongst the populace can be expected to have a negative impact on those who fail to meet those rising expectations--e.g., Latinos.

An additional issue in the United States has to do with the status of literacy in languages other than English. Is one illiterate if he or she is unable to read or write in English but is capable of reading and writing in another language, for example, Spanish? Although this may seem to be answered with an obvious "yes", there are those who say that only English counts (cf. Leibowitz, 1969). Here, the issue of *il*literacy intersects with literacy and with what has become known as the English language ideology (Macías, 1985).

The major purpose of this study was to describe the extent of illiteracy in the Latino community and the social, political, and economic consequen-

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[1] I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Terrence Wiley throughout most of the project, but especially on the bibliographic and computer analysis work. This project was funded by the Inter-University Program/Social Science Research Council competition on Public Policy and Latinos, underwritten by the Ford Foundation. The project grant was awarded to the Tomás Rivera Policy Center, Claremont, CA.

ces of this illiteracy for the Latino community and the nation. More specifically, the questions which guided this research project were the following:

(1) What are the literacy profiles of the various Latino sub-groups in English and Spanish? How are literacy abilities distributed within each of these groups by sex, age, location, schooling, and income?
(2) What do we know about the acquisition of literacy amongst Latinos in the U.S.?
(3) Who is providing literacy instruction to [adult] Latinos?

Literacy polemics as policy context

The debates and politics around literacy seem to always break on the definitions of the term; the scope of literacy; its relationship to the individual and society; and the role of schooling in literacy development. The notion and definition of literacy is not static but is relative to time and to socio-cultural expectations (Resnick and Resnick, 1978). In the United States, literacy expectations are increasing (Scribner, 1984: 7-8). Since notions of literacy do not remain static, attaining and sustaining literacy can be problematic because expectations regarding literacy inflate over time. As expectations change, so do estimates of the adequacy of a population's literacy (Resnick & Resnick, 1978: 370-371). In the mid-nineteenth century, being able to write one's name was a sign of literacy. Today it is not. Resnick and Resnick (1978) note that when a higher literacy standard is applied to the population at large, we are applying a standard of literacy which was at one time only applied to an elite.

As expectations about literacy change, so do the definitions of literacy. The definition and measurement of literacy has dominated much of the social and research discourse on the topic of literacy in the nation. There are several basic groupings in this discourse:

* Literacy as basic skills very often sees literacy as tied to initial learning of reading through phonics and discrete, hierarchically organized and sequenced skills. Comprehension or understanding of the text comes as a result of putting the pieces together and deriving the authors intent.

* Literacy as making meaning is based upon the "comprehension" research of the seventies. It defines reading as the interactive process between reader and text, involving the background knowledge of the reader in making sense/meaning of the text. Meaning is "reconstituted" by the reader using the text as a point of departure, within the social conventions of language form, structure and use.

* Literacy as function is primarily an outgrowth of the policy and ethnographic research on reading and writing. It defines literacy competence as the ability to utilize reading and writing in particular situations. This literacy is not only functional, but it is also a fluid, situationally based ability which does not generalize to all activity. Frequency and kind of literacy uses dominate functional literacy concerns.

* Literacy as culture/civilization extends the notion of literacy to the notion of the literati who are well versed in the classics, knowledgeable of philosophy, humanities, and the fine arts, being literate means that one is well "educated."

* Literacy as power emphasizes the relationship between the literacy acquisition process as empowerment education and the unfolding socio-political advancement of a group or community. Literacy is seen as a means by which the poor and powerless can either claim their place in the world, or use literacy as a fundamental resource for social transformation.

Although many treat these "literacies" equally in the definitional polemics of literacy, they are not. The first two are the closest to being definitions; that is they answer with "literacy is x". Literacy as function describes how "x" is used, not "x" itself (see Heath, 1986), while literacy as culture is prescriptively how "x" ought to be used to acquire specific knowledge, with an attached high status to those prescribed uses (see Hirsch, 1987). Literacy as power, again involves the status of having the ability to do "x", although it isn't clear whether empowerment comes *with* "x" or with the *process* by which one acquires "x" (or "y", "z", etc.).[2] Rather than stretch how one goes about defining a term, or concept, with uses or values of that concept, we should be clear in our definitions.

Another concern over what is meant by literacy is whether reading AND writing is included. Although reading has received the greatest attention in literacy work (in policy considerations and in research), writing has gathered recent attention--especially writing as process. The focus is on composing rather than on the basic mechanics, surface features, or conventions of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Often in the past, literacy has been defined as reading, only to be assessed by "writing tasks," e.g., the ability to write one's name. It is important to keep the two analytically distinct but conceptually related.

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[2] It is clear that reading and writing in and of themselves are not a liberating force for oppressed peoples, even though some argue that literacy is an advance in civilization and culture that is tied to concrete cognitive and intellectual changes and benefits (see Goody, 1968). Freire (1968) and others have argued that it is the *process* of *education* with literacy as a focus of the curriculum that is empowerment.

Literacy is also often characterized as an attribute of individuals or described as being related to individual abilities. However, it is important to acknowledge that far from being an individual possession, literacy can also be seen as social achievement. Literacy is acquired by individuals through social participation in activities with written language (Scribner & Cole, 1978). Similarly, although illiteracy is often seen as a negative attribute of individuals, it is important that illiteracy be also seen in social context--through the patterns of differential distribution of literacy skills by race/ethnic group, social class, and gender.

In the U.S., literacy is usually acquired through formal schooling (the pre-school acquisition of metaliteracy awareness and abilities notwithstanding). Consequently, schooling practices and programs are important in the study of illiteracy because their failure is associated with the "lack of literacy acquisition." After initial literacy instruction, one must use literacy skills to continue to learn and succeed in school. In particular, reading and reading instruction have a central role in schooling, especially beyond third grade, when students change their focus from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Although illiteracy or poor literacy skills in and of themselves do not specifically cause students to leave school, students who have a high risk dropout profile are often poor readers and writers, and poor school achievers. Literacy is a mediating influence of poor school achievement. Thus, poor or undeveloped literacy abilities often go hand in hand with poor academic achievement, low test scores, and other negative indicators of school success and participation. The extent of this school illiteracy or functional literacy needs to be examined, if only to assure its place in the current educational reform movement--statistical visibility provides policy visibility.

The important points to remember in the polemics of literacy are:

* the debates over literacy definitions confuse what it is, its uses, and its status;
* the scope of literacy should include reading as well as writing;
* literacy should be seen as an individual ability as well as a social characteristic/resource; and
* schooling is the most critical process for acquiring and developing literacy; illiteracy is a failure of schooling.

The important applied concerns of this project, thus, extend to educational policy (teaching and learning to read and write), employment and social service policies (the affect of adult illiteracy and functional literacy in having access to and retaining employment and entitled social benefits), as well as language policies in general where literacy may be a pre-condition to social benefits (e.g., voting rights), or government may entertain English-only or bilingual/biliterate policies.

What do we know about Chicano/Latino literacy and illiteracy?

Although there has been much to do about illiteracy in this country since the early sixties, very little research has focused on the illiteracy of Latinos. The available research has tended to be biased in favor of English literacy exclusively; there has been little exploration of the causes or consequences of illiteracy amongst Chicanos/Latinos; and there has been little integration of school age studies with adult literacy studies.

Until very recently the major national surveys have not sampled Latinos. Those national surveys which have literacy data for Latinos have not been analyzed to provide comprehensive and comparative information on Latino literacy. Two national surveys have included samples of Latinos: the 1975 Adult Performance Level Study, and the 1982 English Language Proficiency Study (a third, the National Young Adult Literacy Survey, only surveyed 21-25 year olds). The first estimated that 56% of Hispanics, 25 years old and over, were functionally illiterate, as compared to 39% for Blacks and 34% for Whites (Vargas, 1988:9). The second study estimated between 39% and 48% of the adult Latino population over 20 years of age was illiterate (Vargas, 1988:9). Using a substitute measure of less than 6 years of schooling, the illiteracy rate for Latinos was estimated as 11.9% for those 25 years old and over, and only 1.8% for the rest of the population of the same age. This is a rate 6.6 times greater than the rest of the nation![3] As data collection instruments improve, and data collection procedures assure a better coverage of the Latino community, these basic demographic indicators get better, but literacy studies and surveys lag behind in their adequacy of Latino data.

Very often, the assumption is that Chicanos/Latinos (and other language minorities) face more immediate "problems" in learning [oral] English, rather than [English] literacy.[4] This is part of the psycho-political compartmentalization that allows policy issues to be defined, and thus isolated from each other, as, for example, minority issues, women's issues, and/or national issues. The consequence of this omission in national research and policy analyses has been a lack of appreciation of the extent of illiteracy and literacy, in English and Spanish, among Latinos (Impink-Hernández, 1985).

It is important to note that the major surveys of literacy only relate to English literacy. What is generally missing in national surveys is a broader

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[3] This rate was greater for the Mexican origin population (15.4%), but less for Puerto Ricans (10.3%) and Cubans (6.0%).

[4] This was implicitly recognized in 1978 by Congress when it changed the criteria for eligibility and concern in the Bilingual Education Act from students with limited English *speaking* ability (speaking and understanding), to limited English *proficiency* (speaking, understanding, reading, and writing). This change reflected the concern among educators that Federal policy recognize the importance of English literacy to academic success.

definition of literacy which would encompass literacy in languages other than English. This omission seems significant for 4 reasons.

First, it seems to imply that English literacy -- at least insofar as the United States is concerned -- is the only literacy which counts. It is likely that a high percentage of those who are held to be illiterate (in English) are literate in Spanish (or other languages) (Vargas, 1988:6; also see Table 12 below).[5] Since the United States is the fourth largest Spanish speaking nation in the world (Simon, 1980), failure to recognize Spanish literacy abilities as literacy increases the alleged pool of illiterates who are stigmatized as being non-productive or as being unable to function in society. Language policies which only promote or acknowledge English literacy would thus appear to increase the so-called "literacy crisis."

Second, there is a need for *educational* policies and practices to be guided by a more adequate description of the extent of literacy skills across languages. It is maintained that "cognitive academic language" abilities (which appear to be very similar to literacy) are transferable from one language to another (Cummins, 1984a, 1984b, 1985). Surprisingly, however, little regard for first language literacy assessment has been demonstrated in the education of adult language minorities even though such assessment and tracking of such skills has become a common ingredient of bilingual educational programs for children.

There is also a need to focus more specifically on subgroups among bilingual populations in order to provide more comparative data on the problem. Most major surveys, such as the Young Adult Literacy Survey[6] conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the English Language Proficiency Survey, merely lump language minorities into broad categories. All Latino subgroups are subsumed under the label of Hispanic. Typically, there is no provision for subgroup comparisons of Chicanos, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Central or South Americans, or native born versus foreign born. Similar ambiguity exists among surveys of Asian Americans. Consequently, significant subgroup differences are often ignored.

Fourthly, there is also much speculation as to *why* illiteracy and fewer literate skills are more prevalent among Latinos than among the dominant population. Low educational achievement (Kirsh & Jungeblut (1986) and non-English language background (Ortiz, 1987) have been frequently identified as factors which are associated with illiteracy. Little else has been contributed to the literature as to the causes of illiteracy. Individual testimonies of non-readers, however, almost always begin with the failure of

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[5] This is why it is important to distinguish between native language literacy (literacy in one's first language), and second language literacy (which implies no native language literacy), and biliteracy (literacy in two or more languages).

[6] This was one of the first national surveys on literacy that included a series of screening questions and procedures with a concern not only about illiteracy, but also about the limited English proficiency of the respondents.

the public schools they attended, in teaching them to read and write. Very often these are tales of segregated facilities, curricular tracks, bureaucratic misassessments and social promotions in schools located in low socio-economic neighborhoods. Better information on Latino literacy and illiteracy could provide us with a better understanding of these dynamics.

Information is also lacking in the areas of educational programs and societal treatments which will better help to promote literacy. The extent of illiteracy among Latinos can only be inferred from data which relates to literacy generally, or which relates to native speakers of English and the non-English speaking.

The *economic* and *social* consequences of non-literacy among Latinos follows the concerns about illiteracy among the general population (Vargas, 1986, 1988). The twofold problem of low levels of literacy and educational attainment diminish employment prospects for Latinos. While Latinos contribute to this society as taxpayers, they are unable to reap the full benefits of citizenship, in part, because of low levels of literacy and English proficiency. In addition, low levels of literacy and educational attainment also lessen the ability of Latino parents favorably to influence the education of their children. The role of parents in breaking the so-called cycle of non-literacy has only recently gained increasing attention both in national and state literacy legislation. Lack of English literacy has also been tied to differential participation in the *political* processes of this country and in social and economic benefits which are predicated on English literacy (Leibowitz, 1969; Guevara, 1978). In a number of instances, English literacy requirements have been used as barriers to participation (e.g., for voting). However, the empirical data is scarce to explore these consequences in more detail. In general:

* there is little national, comparative data to profile Latino literacy and illiteracy;
* the data that is available and has included language minority or racial data, has not been much studied or analyzed in relationship to Latinos;
* the lack of data and the paucity of studies on Latino literacy have contributed to a policy invisibility resulting in few resources or programs that specifically address the unique literacy concerns of Latinos; and
* there is a great need to better detail the extent, as well as to know the causes and consequences, of illiteracy in the Latino community.

This study addressed the need for better data and studies to profile the extent and consequences of illiteracy in English and Spanish in the Latino communities.

Methods

The study involved a secondary analysis of three national data sets, and a description of the services being provided Latinos. The 3 data sets were the 1976 Survey of Income and Education, the 1979 National Chicano Survey, and the 1980 Census.

Survey data. The secondary data analysis of the Survey of Income and Education, the National Chicano Survey, and the 1980 Census primarily involved statistical manipulation of the data. Most of these analyses were cross-tabulations of the language and literacy data by Latino sub-group (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, and other Latinos), with background factors (sex, age, geographic location, schooling, and income). Specific alternative analyses of the extent of illiteracy were also done using different measures for literacy specific to the data set. An indirect or surrogate measure often used in the literacy literature, completion of 5 years or less of schooling, was used across the analyses of the different data sets in order to provide some comparability across the data sets and to other studies utilizing similar indirect measures.

Each data set provided different kinds of literacy information. Each was analyzed according to its potential for viable and useful language and literacy information. For example, the National Chicano Survey was a bilingual survey and collected data on the written use of Spanish and English within the household. The SIE had a question regarding the frequency of reading an English language newspaper, but not everyone was asked that question. It is reportable only for those who had a non-English language in their household, as a mother tongue, or as their usual, or often used second language.

The results of these analyses are presented on an ethnic group basis: language and literacy profiles for Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans. The single constant definition of *illiteracy* used was less than six years of schooling for those over 18 years of age. We compared this definition of illiteracy with a self reported non-literacy in the National Chicano Survey and found a good fit for English illiteracy, but not for Spanish literacy.

Of those persons identified as illiterate by the number of school years attended (less than 6 years), 57% reported no literacy skills; 35.3% reported no *English* literacy skills, but literacy skills in Spanish; only 5% reported biliteracy abilities; and only 2.7% reported only English literacy ability. The overlap between illiteracy as measured by the number of years of schooling and self reported *English il*literacy was 92% (see Table 12).

For some of the analyses 2 additional categories were used to estimate "functional literacy" and "literacy" in English. Completion of 6 years of schooling through attendance in the 12th grade was the definition of functional literacy. If a respondent completed the 12th grade or more, then they were classified as English literate. Although we understand that there are individuals who complete their secondary schooling and are still not able to read or write, it seems that this is a much smaller proportion of the

population, possibly balanced out by those who are classified as non-literates by our measure but have since learned to read and write outside of school in later years.

The comparability of the data vary a bit because they used different sampling frames, different questions, and different direct measures of literacy. The literacy results of the completed surveys have not been published or widely disseminated, often because it has not been the primary focus of the surveys.

Given the absence of reliable, comprehensive, comparative, national literacy data on Latinos, our primary intent was to fill this gap as easily and quickly, as possible. The use of indirect measures was not as desirable as direct measures, but these still provided useful information which can be compared with already published data on Anglos and Blacks.

Quality of the survey data. The quality of these data vary regarding literacy. The Survey of Income and Education was a national sample of 150,000 households with approximately 13 language and literacy questions/variables. The National Chicano Survey was a national sample of Mexican Origin households (with about 1000 respondents 17 years old and over) which utilized a bilingual questionnaire, interviewers and data collection methodologies. It is a rich data source which has been under-analyzed for its language data. The 1980 Census included several current language questions, and provides much more in background variables and indirect measures than the other data sets.

Description of literacy program services

The identification of services being provided to the Latino community was accomplished through a literature review, a seminar attended by representatives of national organizations, researchers, policy analysts, and literacy service providers, and through a document review of literacy service provider materials.

Results

Question # 1: What are the literacy profiles of the various Latino subgroups in English and Spanish? (a) How are these literacy abilities distributed within each of these groups by sex, age, location, schooling, and income?[7]

English Illiteracy rates. Illiteracy in English for the total Spanish origin (Hispanic) population in the nation in 1980 (Census), was estimated at 14.7%. The Mexican origin population had a rate of 18.5%, Puerto Ricans

[7] The results of the secondary data analysis is reported in rates, or percentages, in order to more readily compare the results of each data set analysis.

had a rate of 13.4%, Cubans had a rate of 7.8%, while other Latinos had a combined rate of 8.2%.

In 1976 (SIE), the general rate of illiteracy was estimated at 16.9%, while the subgroup rates were: Mexican origin, 20.7%; Puerto Rican, 17%; Cuban, 10%; Central/South Americans, 7.4%; and other Latinos, 8.9%.

The National Chicano Survey reported a 27% illiteracy rate for the Mexican origin population 18 years old and over, as compared to 18.5% (1980 Census), and 20.7% (1976 SIE) (see Table 1).

The rates for English functional literacy were much higher. In 1980, these rates were 36.5% for Mexicans, 39.6% for Puerto Ricans, 28.7% for Cubans, and 28.3% for other Latinos. The overall rate for English functional literacy was 34.5% (see Table 2).

Table 1
English Illiteracy Rates for Latinos in the U.S.

	SIE (1976)	NCS (1979)	CENSUS ('80)
Mexicans	20.70	27.00	18.50
Puerto Ricans	17.00	n/a	13.40
Cubans	10.00	n/a	7.80
Central/So. Amer.	7.40	n/a	n/a
Other Spanish	8.90	n/a	8.20
Total	16.90	n/a	14.70

Table 2
English Illiteracy by Latino Sub-Group, 1980

	Illiterate	Functionally Literate	Literate
Mexicans	18.50	36.50	45.00
Puerto Ricans	13.40	39.60	47.10
Cubans	7.80	28.70	63.50
Other Latinos	8.20	28.30	63.40
TOTAL	14.70	34.50	50.80

Source: 1980 Census. Measure is no. of school years completed.

Sex. There seems to be little difference in the English illiteracy rates for men and women. The rates were similar for all Latinos: males, 16.6% and females, 17.1% for 1976 (SIE); and males, 15.4% and females, 14% for 1980 (Census). Illiteracy varied little between males and females of Mexican origin. Mexican origin men had illiteracy rates from 19.2% (Census) to 20.2% (SIE), to 29% (NCS), while Mexican origin women had rates ranging from 17.8% (Census), to 21.2% (SIE), to 25.6% (NCS) (see Table 3).

Table 3
English Illiteracy Rates by Sex

	SIE (1976)	NCS (1979)	CENSUS ('80)
All Latinos			
Men	16.60	n/a	15.40
Women	17.10	n/a	14.00
Mexicans			
Men	20.20	29.00	19.20
Women	21.20	25.60	17.80

Age. Illiteracy rates for all Latinos increased steadily with age (Census). The rates for different age bands were: 18 years to 25 years of age, 5.6%; 26 to 35 years of age, 8.9%; 36 to 45 years, 14.9%; 46 years to 55 years, 22.9%; 56 years to 65 years, 28.8%; and 66 years of age and up, 42.3%. The NCS indicated higher rates for the Mexican origin population in 1979: 17 years to 25 years of age, 13.9%; 26 to 35 years of age, 16%; 36 to 45 years, 21.5%; 46 years to 55 years, 38.5%; 56 years to 65 years, 51.9%; and 66 years of age and up, 67.1% (see Table 4).

On a different measure of literacy, Latinos between the ages of 21 years and 25 years did slightly poorer (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986). The Young Adult Literacy Survey used the average [English] reading proficiency score for grades 4, 8, and 11, on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), to compare against their direct measure of literacy. About 92% of young adult Hispanics in the nation matched or exceeded the average for grade 4, while 71% matched or exceeded the average for grade 8, and only 52% matched or exceeded the average for grade 11 (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986:40). Put in reverse percentages as illiteracy rates, there were about 8% who did not meet the 4th grade English reading average,

29% who did not meet the 8th grade average, and about 48% who did not meet the 11th grade average.[8]

Table 4
English Illiteracy Rates for Latinos by Age

	NCS (1979)	CENSUS ('80)
18 yrs to 25 yrs	13.90	5.60
26 to 35 yrs	16.00	8.90
36 to 45 yrs	21.50	14.90
46 to 55 yrs	38.50	22.90
56 to 65 yrs	51.90	28.80
66 yrs and up	67.10	42.30

Note: The NCS data is for Mexicans only; the first age band is 17 yrs to 25 yrs.

Location. States varied in illiteracy rates, in 1980, for the total Latino population, with the largest states leading the rankings: TX (21.8%), CA (16.1%), AZ (15.6%), IL (14.9%), NY (11.3%), NM (11%), CO (10.5%), FL (10.3%) (Census). The two state with the largest Mexican population and, apparently the largest immigration, had the highest English illiteracy rate. State illiteracy rates for the Mexican origin population, specifically, were higher: FL (27.1%), TX (22.5%), CA (18.3%), AZ (17.2%), IL (14.3%), NM (13.6%), CO (13.4%) (Census). In 1979, according to the NCS, they were still higher: 26.7% for CA, 31.1% for TX (see Table 5).

Nativity and citizenship. Non-native or non-mainland born Latinos, and non-citizens had higher rates of illiteracy than native born Latinos. For Mexicans born in the United States, [English] illiteracy ranged from 10.7% (Census), to 13.1% (SIE), to 16.0% (NCS), while those born in México had [English] illiteracy rates ranging from 37.4% (SIE) to 44.7% (NCS).

Citizenship through naturalization seemed to provide an indicator of lower English illiteracy rates for the foreign born, but not much. One would expect a possible decrease given the English language requirements for naturalization. The illiteracy rate for native born Mexicans was estimated at 10.7% as compared to naturalized Mexicans which was estimated at 32%; for foreign born non-citizen Mexicans it was estimated at 34.3%.

[8] The rates for Whites and Blacks were: 4th grade, 96% and 82% respectively; 8th grade, 85% and 53% respectively; and for the 11th grade, 68% and 31% respectively. The rates for the total national young adult population were: 4th grade, 94%; 8th grade, 80%; and 11th grade, 62%. Latinos fell between Whites and Blacks, but certainly below the national totals, on this measure.

Naturalization is a moot point for Puerto Ricans, since they are already citizens of the U.S., whether born on the island or abroad (of citizen parents). Mainland born Puerto Ricans had a low rate of 2%, while island born Puerto Ricans had an illiteracy rate of 18.5%. Native born Cubans also had a low rate of 3.8%, while Cuban naturalized citizens had a rate of 5.2%, and foreign born, non-citizen Cubans had a rate of 10.8%. For the other Spanish origin populations, the combined rates for native born was 5.3%, naturalized citizens was 4.4%, and for non-citizens it was 14% (see Table 6).

Table 5
English Illiteracy Rates for Latinos by State

	SIE (1976)		NCS (1979)	CENSUS ('80)	
	Total	Mexican		Total	Mexican
Arizona	15.70	16.60	n/a	15.60	17.20
California	16.60	19.10	26.70	16.10	18.30
Colorado	7.40	6.40	n/a	10.50	13.40
Florida	11.30	7.90	n/a	10.30	27.10
Illinois	23.10	25.90	n/a	14.90	14.30
New Mexico	13.00	n/a	n/a	11.00	13.60
New York	14.90	n/a	n/a	11.30	n/a
Texas	25.20	n/a	31.10	21.80	22.50

Table 6
English Illiteracy Rates by Nativity and Citizenship

	CENSUS ('80)
Mexicans	
Native born	10.70
Naturalized	32.00
For. born non-cit.	34.30
Puerto Ricans	
Mainland born	2.00
Island born	18.50
Cubans	
Native born	3.80
Naturalized	5.20
Foreign born	10.80
Other Latinos	
Native born	5.30
Naturalized	4.40
Foreign born	14.00

Bilingualism. Illiteracy rates, in 1980, were higher for Latinos who were Spanish monolinguals (37.6%) than for bilinguals (8.1%) or English monolinguals (4.3%) (Census). For the Mexican origin population in 1979, the estimates were: Spanish monolinguals, 53.8%; bilinguals, 12.2%; and for English monolinguals, 1.7% (NCS) (see Table 7).

Table 7
English Illiteracy Rates for Latinos by Oral Bilingualism

	NCS (1979)	CENSUS ('80)
English monolinguals	2.40	4.30
Bilinguals	13.80	8.10
Spanish monolinguals	50.50	37.60

Source: Wiley, 1988, A-15

Table 8
English Illiteracy Rates for Latinos by Personal Income

	NCS (1979)	CENSUS ('80)
No income	n/a	15.70
< $5,000	25.50	21.30
$5,000 to $9,999	24.10	14.60
$10,000 to $14,999	13.40	7.80
$15,000 to $19,999	11.80	6.10
$20,000 to $24,999	5.60	5.30
$25,000 to $29,999	9.10	8.10
> $30,000	0.00	5.80

Table 9
Employment status by English Illiteracy

	EMPLOYED	
	YES	NO
English Illiteracy [NCS]	20.30	35.30

Income. Illiteracy rates for all Latinos declined steadily as personal income went up: 15.7% for those with no income; 21.3% for those with $5,000 or less annual income in 1979; 14.6% for those with income from $5,000 to $9,999; 7.8% for those with income between $10,000 and $14,999; 6.1% for those with income between $15,000 and $19,999; 5.3% for those with income between $20,000 and $24,999; 8.1% for those between $25,000 and $29,999; and 5.8% for those with incomes of $30,000 and over (Census).

Illiteracy rates for the Mexican origin population also declined steadily as personal income went up: 25.5% for those with $5,000 or less annual income in 1979; 24.1% for those with income from $5,000 to $9,999; 13.4% for those with income between $10,000 and $14,999; 11.8% for those with income between $15,000 and $19,999; 5.6% for those with income between $20,000 and $24,999; and 9.1% for those between $25,000 and $29,999 (NCS) (see Table 8).

The English illiteracy rate for those *Latinos who were employed* was 20.3%, while it was 35.3% for those who were *unemployed*. More than one out of 3 unemployed Latino workers was not literate in English (see Table 9). The employment status also differed between those Latinos who were not literate in English and those who were. About 42% of *those persons not literate* in English were employed, while 58% were unemployed. Of those Latinos who were functionally literate, 50% were employed and 50% were unemployed. Of those who were English literate, almost 3 out of 4 were employed (73.4%), while 26.6% were unemployed (see Table 10).

Illiteracy in both English and Spanish & Biliteracy.[9] The NCS is unique as a data set because it includes data on Spanish language and literacy as well as on English. Using a self report measure, the NCS estimated 26% of the Mexican origin population was *not literate in English OR Spanish* in 1979. Approximately 32% reported literacy abilities *only in English*, while 20% reported biliteracy in *English AND Spanish*, and 22% reported literacy *only in Spanish* (see Table 11).

If we use this data to understand our estimates of English illiteracy using the number of school years completed, we find some interesting conclusions. Of those who were classified as English illiterate (using less than 6 school years completed as the measure), 35% were literate in Spanish (only). This means that more than 1 out of 3 persons might be able to use their Spanish literacy to acquire English literacy since they are already literate. It also shows that the resulting rate of English illiteracy as measured by less than 6 school years completed and the self report overlap 92% (combining the self reported no-literacy and Spanish literacy accounts for 92% of those with less than 6 years of schooling) (see Table 12).

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[9] For a detailed analysis of biliteracy using the NCS, cf. Wiley, 1988. It presents data using both measures of literacy--the self reported literacy abilities and the number of school years completed.

Table 10
English Illiteracy by Employment Status

	English Illit.	Functional Lit.	English Lit.
Employed			
Yes	41.70	50.00	73.40
No	58.30	50.00	26.60
TOTALS	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Wiley, 1988, A-8

Table 11
Biliteracy Rates for the Mexican Origin Population

	NCS (1979)
No English/No Spanish literacy	26.00
English literacy only	31.70
Spanish literacy only	22.20
English AND Spanish literacy	20.10

Table 12
Completed Years of School by Self Reported Literacy Abilities for Respondents

	NCS (1979)		
	< 6 yrs	6-11 yrs	> 12 yrs
English literacy	2.70	31.00	56.50
Biliteracy	5.00	18.00	35.20
Spanish literacy	35.30	27.90	4.40
No literacy	57.00	23.20	3.80
TOTAL	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Wiley, 1988, 4-3

Question #2: What do we know about the acquisition of literacy amongst Latinos in the U.S.?

The required ages for school attendance are the most critical period for the acquisition of literacy, particularly those between the entrance to school and the 3rd grade. However we may complain about the accuracy of the above mentioned data, there is one thing very clear--Latinos (principally Mexicans and Puerto Ricans) are not acquiring literacy in large numbers during this period. Although it is important to remember that, statistically, many of the Latino English non-literates are foreign born, Spanish monolingual, non-citizens and older, much of the anecdotal data from Latino illiterates themselves tends to indict the public schools. It is one thing to say that Latinos are not literate in English because they have not had the access or opportunity to be schooled in this country. It is quite another to say that despite the opportunity for schooling in this country, Latinos still do not acquire English literacy or acquire it well.

The most common single measure of English literacy during the school age period is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In a relatively recent effort, the NAEP sampled the national enrollment in such a way as to be able to present data for "Hispanics." The NAEP reports that Latinos have lagged behind Whites, and close to Blacks, in reading achievement (NAEP, 1985). For 9 year-olds during the academic year 1983-84, the average reading proficiency score for Whites was 220, while for Blacks it was 188 and for Latinos it was 193. For 13 year-olds the mean reading score for Whites was 263, for Blacks it was 237, and for Latinos it was 239. From the same study, the mean reading score for 17 year-old Whites was 295, for Blacks it was 264, and for Latinos it was 269 (see Table 13).[10]

We can expect literacy acquisition to take time, but it takes longer for Latinos than for Whites. For example, thirteen year olds are approximately at the 8th grade (give or take a year) with normal grade progression through the schools. They are certainly above the completion of the sixth grade, the level for English functional literacy we used in this study. On the 5-level scale of reading proficiency used by the NAEP, the middle level is "intermediate" with a threshold score of 250. Below this level are "basic" and "rudimentary." The percentage of 13 year old White students to have reached this intermediate level of English proficiency in 1983-84, was 67%; the percentage of Blacks was 35%; and the percentage of Hispanics was 39%. This 39% of Latinos represents only about two-thirds the percentage of Whites (58%) who reached this threshold level of reading proficiency.

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10 The thresholds for 5 different literacy proficiency levels were: rudimentary=150; basic=200; intermediate=250; adept=300; and advanced=350.

Table 13
NAEP Mean Reading Scores by Ethnicity, 1971-1984

	White	Black	Hispanic
Age 9			
1970-71	214.40	169.30	n/a
1974-75	215.90	181.90	182.90
1979-80	219.70	188.90	189.10
1983-84	220.10	188.40	193.00
Age 13			
1970-71	260.10	220.30	n/a
1974-75	260.90	224.40	231.10
1979-80	263.10	231.90	236.00
1983-84	263.40	236.80	239.20
Age 17			
1970-71	290.40	240.60	n/a
1974-75	290.70	244.00	254.70
1979-80	291.00	246.10	261.70
1983-84	294.60	263.50	268.70

Source: NAEP, 1985, Data Appendix, p. 65

Table 14
Percentage Hispanic Students At or Above
the Five NAEP Reading Proficiency Levels, 1974-1984

	Rudimentary (150)	Basic (200)	Intermediate (250)	Adept (300)	Advanced (350)
Age 9					
1974-75	82.30	33.50	3.20	0.00	0.00
1979-80	84.30	37.60	4.40	0.00	0.00
1983-84	88.20	43.80	4.70	0.00	0.00
Age 13					
1974-75	98.20	81.40	29.80	1.30	0.00
1979-80	99.40	85.20	33.70	2.70	0.00
1983-84	100.00	88.30	39.40	1.70	0.00
Age 17					
1974-75				12.90	0.50
1979-80				12.70	0.40
1983-84				19.90	1.50

Source: NAEP, 1985, Data Appendix, p. 66-71.

The causes for this discrepancy in school achievement depend on how one sees schools, curriculum, social change, and racial minorities (Macías, 1984). However, there are a couple of points that need to be made here on the effectiveness of literacy instruction; one having to do with the relationship between native language literacy and second language literacy, and the other one with effective literacy instruction for Chicanos and other Latinos. For those students who come to school with little or no proficiency in English, the recent research on effective bilingual instruction, suggests that native language literacy is a critical threshold for successfully acquiring not only English language orality but also English language literacy, and subject matter achievement (cf. Wong-Fillmore, 1987; Krashen & Biber, 1987). Certainly the benefits of biliteracy and bilingualism to lifelong productivity should not be argued.

The second point to be made has to do with using alternate approaches to reading (and writing) instruction for Latinos. Whereas most of the reading instruction in the nation is segmented, hierarchical skills teaching, the use of whole language instruction (where reading as meaning-making is paramount) as an alternative with some students seems to be more productive for two reasons. The first reason is that the background knowledge of the student is recognized, integrated, and built on in the whole language approach, whereas it tends to be ignored in the basic skills approach (cf. Macías, 1988). We know that the familiarity of textual content and text structure has a positive influence on reading comprehension (as measured by recall and fluency) (Durán, 1986). Techniques like the Language Experience Approach to instruction, building on the students words and experiences, are much more successful with low income students than "traditional" techniques. The second reason that the whole language approach to literacy instruction is an important alternative to the dominant mode of reading instruction is that it is integrative across the language arts. Reading is integrated with writing is integrated with literature is integrated with other literacy uses in other subjects. This integration makes the acquisition and use of reading and writing much more effective for school age learners.

This comparison and contrast of instructional approaches ought not be taken as an either/or comparison. Yet, it makes little sense to continue with more of the same "medicine" when some students are not benefitting from it. Alternative approaches should not only be identified and promoted, they should be encouraged. Whereas whole language instruction is often introduced by individual teacher commitment, it should be pursued and promoted institutionally as educational policy (Silva, in press).

One last point should be made about school age literacy instruction. It is generally taken for granted that schooling is good for the students. There are times when students do not learn as much from teachers and schools as we might want them to. This is seen, however, as only a matter of degree; the concern is over how much is learned. For Latinos and other racial

minorities, certain school practices are being identified as barriers to effective schooling. Certainly, we can't deny that there has been institutional discrimination. More recently, researchers have been viewing the negative effects of bad teaching, and have found that *bad* teaching can be harmful, in school success, and, implied, life-long negative effects. The anecdotal evidence that comes from adult, native born Latino non-readers are clear testimony to the belief that there are life-long negative effects to schooling that did not assure literacy acquisition. One cannot overemphasize this point, because it is masked in the dominant characteristics of the adult illiterate. Latino adult non-literates are predominantly foreign born, Spanish monolingual, and older. It seems to imply that younger Latinos are learning English, especially the native born. Illiteracy might very well take care of itself over time. This is not the case as we see the Latino school age population not acquire [English] literacy.

Question #3 Who is providing literacy instruction to [adult] Latinos?

There are several major "literacy" policy initiatives being undertaken at present. Some of these are national, others are state or locally based. The efforts at the national level are of two kinds: (1) legislation which provides some monies for literacy training (through the Library Literacy Act, for example), and exemplary practices, etc., but which reflects more a sense of Congress over a "burgeoning" problem, encourages the improvement of schools to prevent "it" from "spreading," and encourages volunteerism to eradicate it.

The second national effort to address illiteracy is the mobilization of national volunteer organizations dedicated to teaching literacy: Literacy Volunteers, the Laubauch organization, and others. Although they are privately funded and operate on volunteerism greatly, there are several which function to influence policies and programs in this area, and find themselves facing the "demographic realities" of their mission with awe.

The state and local efforts seem to be targeting adult basic education (ABE) programs, English as a second language (ESL) programs, and library centered literacy training. In California, for example, legislation has targeted supplemental literacy funds for libraries to solicit the participation of school-age children in the literacy training of the illiterate parent. The motivation is to break a perceived cycle of illiteracy through the parent-reading-to-child strategy. Very often, this type of legislation does not speak directly to, or take into account the unique characteristics of, Latinos or Spanish language literacies.

Programs such as ABE and vocational (VOC) training are generally available for literacy/basic skills instruction, but frequently are not specifically designed for Latinos. There should be a stronger explicit literacy focus between adult basic education (ABE) programs and English as a second language (ESL) programs, especially for Latinos. For example, 80% of California's ABE student population is enrolled in ESL programs, and nearly

half of these were identified as "Spanish-speaking" in 1982-1983. Since ABE programs are mostly concerned with "functional literacy" there is a need for ESL programs (which are mainly providing oral English grammar instruction) to more directly address [English] literacy issues. Generally, there is a need to explore the intersection of orality and literacy issues in terms of *second* language and literacy acquisition.

Several major national organizations have recently identified literacy amongst the Latino population as an important social, educational, and policy issue (cf. Vargas, 1988).

Conclusion

It is clear that literacy is differentially distributed within the national population. Latinos are more apt to be non-literate in English than Whites or the nation as a whole. There is a need to better understand the extent of illiteracy, and the causes and consequences of illiteracy. In particular, there is a need to better understand schooling and instructional practices for Latinos since literacy acquisition and schooling are interrelated. There is a need for a more systematic and accurate data base which focuses on Latinos generally, and Latino subgroups specifically. More specifically we need to know:

* What policy barriers exist to gaining literacy?
* What benefits or access are based upon English literacy only?
* What are the social, economic, and political consequences of illiteracy for the Latino community?
* What mechanisms can be developed which will stimulate participation from the Latino community in addressing literacy concerns?
* What educational treatments are most effective with Latinos?
* What types of programs have been most successful in promoting Latino literacy?

Based upon the importance attached to literacy and educational achievement in our society, there is also a need for educational policies to be guided by both descriptive data on the nature and extent of non-literacy and educational disadvantages among various ethnic and linguistic groups. Moreover, the policies need to be based upon an informed understanding of the relative merits of various theoretical positions which provide a basis for educational programs and instruction. Consequently, there is a need to describe the schooling characteristics of the Chicano population relative to

literacy abilities, language abilities, and other relevant demographic characteristics.

Policy research and analysis framework. Policy makers and strategists can approach this issue comprehensibly by utilizing a policy research and analysis framework. A policy research and analysis framework to address illiteracy amongst Latinos should include 4 concerns:

(1) We must keep in mind the acquisition of literacy, primarily in the schools and in those pre-school experiences which enhance or develop literacies within our communities.

(2) Along with this concern for acquisition of literacy, is a concern for those barriers to acquisition, particularly those which are school based.

(3) For those who enter U.S. schools after the third grade (immigrants, refugees, and others), we need to be concerned with their prior schooling experiences, their literacy abilities in Spanish (and Indian languages), and the acquisition of (and barriers to) English literacy. This would include non-literate and literate adults.

(4) A final concern is the use of English literacy requirements as a mechanism of social control of Mexicans and other Latinos. These particular policies should be identified and evaluated for their impact on the quality of life of Latinos in the U.S.

These four areas (literacy acquisition, barriers to acquisition, adolescent and adult illiteracy; and English literacy requirements) provide the framework to develop a long-term, comprehensive policy research and analysis agenda.

From a perspective of the national self-interest this country cannot afford to ignore a problem which is widespread among a substantial minority of its population (Vargas, 1986). Whereas Latinos currently represent 6.9% of the national labor force, they will comprise over 10% of it by 2000 (Fullerton, 1987:20).[11] In California the Latino population is expected to represent nearly one third of the state population by the year 2000 (CPEC, 1985). The other Southwestern states, Illinois, New York, New Jersey and Florida are all also expected to continue to have substantial numbers of Latinos.

Low literacy levels among such a substantial part of the total labor force cannot but have a negative impact on the national labor pool since "In a

[11] The Latino proportion of the labor force is expected to grow 74% from 1986 (8.1 million) to 2000 (14.1 million), at a rate of 4.1% per annum (as compared to a growth rate of 1.0% for Whites, 1.8% for Blacks, and 3.9% for Asians and others) (cf. Fullerton, 1987:23).

technological society, the need for the nation's work force to be continuously replenished by adequately trained and functionally literate workers becomes increasingly important" (Vargas, 1986:9). Only a national, coordinated effort that addresses the entire populations risk of illiteracy through the schools AND provides culturally relevant literacy services to ALL segments of the national population, can assure a positive and productive future.

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